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Chairman: Mr. Wenaweser ..... (Liechtenstein)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 43: Follow-up to the outcome of the special session on children (*continued*) (A/57/350)

Agenda item 105: Promotion and protection of the rights of children (*continued*) (A/57/41 and Corr.1, A/57/235, A/57/402)

1. **Mr. Cherif** (Tunisia), speaking on agenda item 105, said that, despite the untiring efforts made at the national, regional and international levels, the situation of children still gave cause for concern in numerous areas and in many regions, particularly in Africa, and he urged the international community to intensify its cooperation.

2. With regard to the protection of children affected by armed conflict, Tunisia advocated the strengthening of the legal framework and called upon States to sign, ratify and implement the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. With regard to peacekeeping operations, mandates should include a component relating to the protection of the rights of the child, and personnel should be given appropriate training in that area. The role of United Nations bodies in the field should also be strengthened, and they should be provided with effective means of intervention for the protection of children.

3. At the national level, Tunisia had undertaken ongoing action to harmonize its policies with the values and principles enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the two Protocols thereto. It had adopted a national plan of action for children and taken numerous initiatives in that field: the establishment of a higher council for children, whose main task was to define a coherent strategy for the promotion of children and to evaluate their needs; the promulgation, in 1995, of a code for the protection of children; the establishment of implementation and follow-up mechanisms, such as the corps of child protection officers, which collaborated with the parties concerned; the establishment of a centre for information, training, documentation and study relating to the protection of the rights of the child, entrusted with the task of monitoring the situation of children, assembling data on the subject, at the national and international levels and participating in the drawing up of policies and programmes aimed at promoting the rights of the child and the protection and growth of children; and the organization of a forum, named the "Children's Parliament", designed to teach children from the earliest age responsibility, tolerance and democratic values and the importance of participation in public life.

4. With regard, more particularly, to education and training, the endeavour made by the State, which allocated 20 per cent of its budget to that sector, had brought the school enrolment rate to 99 per cent and had also resulted in qualitative reforms in the education system and the modernization of curricula.

5. **Mr. Saleh** (Bahrain) said that children enjoyed particular attention throughout the world, as was demonstrated by the large number of States which had signed or ratified the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child. Legislative texts relating to the rights of the child had been considerably improved over the past 20 years. In order to ensure their implementation, however, it was necessary to combat poverty and to work for respect of human rights, of which the rights of the child were an integral part.

6. The Constitution, legislation, policies and national programmes of Bahrain were entirely compatible with many of the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Bahrain had become a party to the Convention in 1992, as well as to a number of texts of the International Labour Organization, including Convention 182 concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour (1999) and Convention 138 concerning Minimum Age for Admission to Employment (1973). The Council of Ministers had adopted Decree No. 15 of 11 July 1999 establishing a national committee on children to coordinate all issues concerning children, to ensure the legal protection of children in all sectors and to draw up an inventory of children's problems and basic needs and endeavour to deal with them. The Kingdom of Bahrain had published two major reports, the first, in July 2000, concerning measures for the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the second, in January 2001, concerning the end-of-decade balance sheet on the follow-up given to the World Summit for Children. It had set up a centre offering day-care services (1993), carried out a project designed to integrate pupils suffering from various disabilities in regular classes and set up a committee on adolescent health (1999). The Ministry of Health had

established a committee to protect children against abuse and negligence (1990) and a committee for the promotion of maternal and child health (1992). Since overpopulation was one of the main obstacles to economic and social development, family planning services were also receiving extensive attention in the national health strategies. In 1984, Bahrain had opened a centre for children of unknown parentage. Lastly, education was free for children aged from 6 to 17 years, in accordance with article 7 of the Constitution.

7. At the regional and international levels, the Kingdom of Bahrain had participated in the Arab High-Level Conference on the Rights of the Child, held at the headquarters of the League of Arab States from 2 to 4 July 2000, as well as in the special session of the General Assembly on children in May 2002, at which it had reaffirmed its resolve to promote the rights of the child and to discharge its obligations in that regard. The purpose of all those meetings had been to bring to fruition the efforts made at the national, regional and international levels to ensure children's development and to carry out those efforts using an integrated approach that took into account the political, economic, social and cultural aspects of the question in order that children might enjoy a better future.

8. At the 1990 World Summit for Children, leaders from all over the world had undertaken to ensure that children were protected from the consequences of war and able to live in peace and security. However, as the Secretary-General stated in his report (A/S-27/3), the decade since the Summit had witnessed ethnic conflicts and civil wars in which children had been the victims of violence. In that regard, mention should be made of the suffering endured by Palestinian children living under Israeli occupation and the barbaric practices that Israeli settlers and the occupation forces engaged in for the purpose of spreading terror, giving rise to loss of human life and permanent disabilities. The international community should, as a matter of urgency, take measures to put an end to the criminal practices to which Israel subjected Palestinian families and children, in flagrant violation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the fourth Geneva Convention relating to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and human rights generally.

9. **Ms. G/Meskel** (Ethiopia) said that international terrorism, globalization, HIV/AIDS, environmental degradation and the unpredictability of world financial markets had reduced the effectiveness of measures taken by Governments to assist children. She called on the international community to direct its efforts and resources towards those areas where the potential for change was greatest.

10. Ethiopia, having acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, was integrating the principles enshrined in it into national policy. Committees on the rights of the child had been established at the national and regional levels with a view to monitoring the implementation of the Convention, which had been translated into various local languages and distributed. Those measures were expected to strengthen awareness-raising campaigns against child abuse.

11. In the area of health, the Ethiopian Government had adopted a preventive approach which gave special attention to the needs of the family, particularly women and children. The major health problems, including immunization against preventable diseases, had therefore been addressed and access to health-care services had improved considerably. School health programmes had also been introduced, in order to provide information on HIV/AIDS and encourage the creation of health clubs in schools. A strategy to raise children's awareness of the principles of the Convention and the prevention of diseases such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and polio had also been implemented in schools. The Government, in partnership with other agencies, was working on a policy to fully subsidize primary health care for children.

12. Primary education was free and delivered in various native languages. Several strategies and programmes were being implemented in order to increase the enrolment rate and decrease the dropout rate, in particular for girls. In that connection, she was pleased to note that there had been a significant improvement in the primary school enrolment rate for girls.

13. Ethiopia observed the policies and standards prohibiting the recruitment of children under the age of 18 to the armed forces and had ratified the Convention concerning Minimum Age for Admission to Employment. The Ethiopian Labour Proclamation and the Civil and Penal Codes contained provisions that were fully compatible with article 32 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Proclamation prohibited the employment of children

under 14 years of age and contained specific provisions concerning children between the ages of 14 and 18.

14. In the area of poverty reduction, Ethiopia was working on strategies which gave due consideration to gender and human rights, including the rights of the child.

15. Despite the progress made, a number of problems, in particular, the unfavourable terms of trade for developing countries and the HIV/AIDS pandemic, still affected the situation of Ethiopian children.

16. **Mr. Win** (Myanmar) said that Myanmar was a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, having acceded to it in 1991, and had submitted its second national report on the implementation of the Convention. In 1993, it had promulgated a law on children and had developed and implemented a series of national plans, overseen by the National Committee on the Rights of the Child, in order to ensure the survival, protection and development of children.

17. The Government of Myanmar was in the process of implementing a thirty-year national education promotion programme, the aim of which was to ensure that all school-age children were able to attend school. The enrolment rate was constantly increasing (91 per cent in 1999/00; 91.5 per cent in 2000/01 and 92.05 per cent in 2001/02) and, following the launch of a nationwide school enrolment campaign in May 2002, which had resulted in the enrolment of 1,230,000 children in kindergarten classes, had reached 93.07 per cent. At the primary level, the enrolment rate for boys was 51 per cent, as compared to 49 per cent for girls, but at the university level, women accounted for 51 per cent of all students. In order to build on those successes and to reduce the dropout rate, Myanmar was also implementing various projects in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

18. Children in especially difficult circumstances, inter alia, orphans and street children, were the most vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. The national plan of action launched in 1990 offered them protection and improved their standard of living by providing opportunities for academic and vocational training and extra-curricular activities. In order to protect children from sexual exploitation and abuse, the National Committee on the Rights of the Child was working in close cooperation with the National Committee for Women's Affairs with a view to combating trafficking in women and children. Myanmar was also cooperating with other countries in the Mekong region and the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) to prevent transnational trafficking in persons, particularly women and children. A multisectoral mobile team had recently been established to combat the trafficking of women and children; the focus of that team was prevention through awareness. Myanmar had also adopted legal provisions to prevent the recruitment of children for use in armed conflict and, under the law on narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, those who made use of children to commit offences relating to narcotic drugs were liable to maximum penalties.

19. In the area of child health, he recalled that Myanmar had launched an immunization programme for children under one year of age in 1978 and a polio eradication programme in 1990. A National Immunization Day had been designated, and mass immunization was carried out throughout the country. As a result, 84 per cent of children under five years of age had been immunized against polio and, in 2000, 90 per cent of children under one year of age had been immunized.

20. **Mr. Hasmi** (Malaysia), speaking on behalf of the States members of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), said that those countries, which had a very young population, attached great importance to the promotion and protection of the rights of the child, which had been placed in the forefront of their policy for cooperation on economic and social development and issues. Following the World Summit on Children, ASEAN had adopted a Plan of Action for Children, which provided a framework for promoting regional cooperation for the survival, protection and development of children. It had also recently approved the Declaration on the Commitments on Children in ASEAN, adopted in 2001, which was the first document entirely dedicated to ASEAN children in the current millennium.

21. Among other things, member States had agreed on the need to address the problems of child abuse, neglect and exploitation, including child prostitution, child labour, street children and abandoned children. They had also attached high priority to combating trafficking in children. Mindful that the challenge could not be surmounted by any one country acting alone, ASEAN had drawn up cooperation programmes

to combat child trafficking and intercountry adoption. It had also put in place plans to provide alternative family care arrangements for the victims of child abuse, neglect and exploitation, as well as to address the special needs of children with disabilities.

22. Recognizing the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS, which posed serious developmental challenges to humankind and which disproportionately affected the young, ASEAN had convened a summit on HIV/AIDS in November 2001 in Brunei Darussalam, in conjunction with its seventh summit. The objective had been to make the issue of HIV/AIDS a priority and to ensure the collaboration of member States in intercountry and cross-border issues, as well as to exchange technical expertise and experiences.

23. **Mr. Al-Nagbi** (United Arab Emirates) said that, 12 years after the convening of the World Summit for Children, thousands of children in the poor developing countries were still living in tragic conditions. More than 10 million children died each year before reaching the age of five, and 15 million others saw their parents die of AIDS. In addition, children continued to be subjected to the worst forms of exploitation, in particular sexual exploitation and involvement in armed conflict. The international community, in particular the developed countries and donors, should heed the recommendations of the relevant international conferences and provide financial and technical assistance to poor countries to enable them to implement economic development programmes and improve health and education services for families and, consequently, children.

24. The United Arab Emirates was deeply concerned by the question of children who were the victims of armed conflict and foreign occupation and called upon the international organizations concerned with the question of human rights and the rights of the child to strengthen the international instruments relating to protection of children against all forms of aggression and to redouble their efforts to put an end to the killings and forced displacements to which children were subjected in many parts of the world, in particular in the occupied Palestinian territories, where children were deliberately murdered by the Israeli Occupation Forces, which did not hesitate to use internationally prohibited weapons. Since September 2000, 848 Palestinian children had been killed, 7,000 others had been wounded, and 980 suffered from a permanent disability. The United Nations, and more particularly the Security Council, should compel Israel to put an immediate end to the daily massacres perpetrated against Palestinian civilians and to comply with the provisions of the fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. The United Arab Emirates also called for an end to the suffering of Iraqi children, who had for 12 years been suffering the effects of the sanctions imposed on their country.

25. The United Arab Emirates had registered some major achievements for the benefit of children. It had established nine preventive medicine centres, distributed throughout its national territory, which carried out vaccination campaigns and provided maternal and child welfare services, specialized centres for children having special needs, which aimed to ensure their reintegration in society, and specialized medical centres for schoolchildren. Lastly, a bill setting forth a blueprint for the protection of the rights of children and the satisfaction of their needs was under consideration at the State level.

26. **Ms. Rasheed** (Observer for Palestine), speaking on agenda item 105, said that children were the most vulnerable members of society, especially in view of the scourges of poverty, violence, armed conflict and foreign occupation. The international community should promote and protect their rights, as the special session of the General Assembly on children had stressed and as was envisaged in the Plan of Action of the World Summit for Children.

27. The fact that millions of children died from preventable diseases, suffered from malnutrition, were living in absolute poverty or, particularly in the case of girls, did not have access to education was unimaginable. The eradication of those scourges would make it possible to offer children a better future.

28. The international community had expressed deep concern about the lot of Palestinian children, who, for more than 35 years, had been the victims of the Israeli occupation. More particularly, during the past two years, the Israeli occupation forces had committed countless war crimes, denied Palestinian children access to education and health care and subjected them to both physical and psychological trauma. The war crimes, State terrorism and systematic human rights violations committed by the Israeli occupying forces had resulted in the killing of more than 1,877 Palestinian civilians, of whom more than 458 had been

children under the age of 18. While some had been killed because they had been throwing stones, others had been killed or injured while in their homes, in the street or in school. The humanitarian crisis facing the Palestinian people, reflected, in particular, by a drastic deterioration in the health of thousands of children, was continually worsening.

29. The acts committed by the Israeli occupying forces constituted a flagrant violation of international law and, in particular, the fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Palestinian children, who should be able to develop freely in their own independent State, were currently living in a world — that of life under occupation — that could in no way be reconciled with the ideal of a world fit for children.

30. Her delegation was submitting a draft resolution entitled "The situation of and assistance to Palestinian children" and trusted that it would receive the support of the majority of the members of the Committee.

31. **Mrs. Mahouve Same** (Cameroon) said that children, as one of the most vulnerable groups in society, merited special attention and protection.

32. The implementation of the rights of children was compromised by poverty, poor economic and social conditions, AIDS, natural catastrophes, illiteracy and lack of legal protection. There were thus grounds for welcoming the concerted action being taken by the United Nations Children's Fund, other United Nations bodies and non-governmental organizations for the implementation of the rights of children. Her delegation also noted with satisfaction the following initiatives: the adoption of the two Optional Protocols, the one on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the other on the involvement of children in armed conflict, both of which it had signed in 2001; the preparation of the report of the Secretary-General on the status of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (A/57/295), which it had ratified in 1993; the preparation by the Secretariat of a report on violence against children; and the decision of the Security Council to accord increased attention to the problems of children involved in armed conflict. Her delegation also welcomed the work done by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and the creation of a specific mechanism for that question within the conflict prevention, management and settlement machinery of the African Union.

33. In view of the importance of education and the implementation of children's rights, Cameroon had made primary education free for all and was endeavouring to guarantee equality of opportunity in that area for both sexes.

34. Cameroon had become a party to almost all of the international legal instruments relating to child protection and promotion, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In 1991, it had adopted a national plan of action to ensure the implementation of the recommendations of the 1990 World Summit for Children. That plan gave priority to: early childhood; basic education for all children; drinking water supply and sanitation; the strengthening of peripheral health units; the protection of children in difficult situations; and HIV/AIDS control.

35. Cameroon had taken preventive measures to combat the economic exploitation of children and was putting the final touches to a national plan to combat child labour.

36. Although not affected by the phenomenon of sexual tourism, in 1998 Cameroon had enacted a law regulating tourist activity.

37. Although it had made significant progress in fulfilling the commitments made at the time of the Summit for Children, Cameroon was encountering a certain number of obstacles. The international community must support the efforts being made by States to build a world fit for children.

38. **Mr. Al-Enezi** (Kuwait) said that protecting children meant protecting the family and society as a whole and that the rights of the child were inseparable from human rights. The importance that Kuwait accorded to children was reflected in the provisions of its Constitution. Kuwait had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991, and on 1 October of each year it celebrated the Day of the Arab Child. In addition to free education and health care, Kuwaiti children, who represented 50 per cent of the population, enjoyed many cultural and scientific infrastructures, including the Scientific Centre, the Children's House of Culture and the Centre for the Prevention of Disabling Diseases.

39. The Convention on the Rights of the Child had been ratified by 191 countries, but in many parts of the

world, children continued to live in extremely difficult economic and social conditions and were the victims of armed conflict, sexual exploitation, poverty and AIDS. In that regard, Kuwait looked forward to the publication of the in-depth study to be submitted by the Secretary-General on the question of violence against children and the recommendations accompanying it, with a view to taking the necessary measures for achieving fixed objectives and thus improving the lot of children. With regard to the question of violence against children, some Kuwaiti children were also the victims of violence and continued to be deprived of their parents or relatives who were among the 615 Kuwaiti prisoners and nationals of third countries of whom there was still no news.

40. Nor could one pass over in silence the plight of Palestinian children in the occupied territories, who were suffering the acts of violence committed by the Israeli Forces in violation of all the international conventions and instruments relating to human rights in general, and to the rights of the child in particular.

41. **Ms. Piá-Comella** (Andorra) said that despite the progress made, the situation of children remained critical in many regions of the world because of poverty and exploitation.

42. The campaign to combat poverty would involve improving the education and health of children. In that respect, every effort should be made to meet the health and education goals set during the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly on children. There was a particular need to strengthen education policies for girls, for two main reasons: access to education would enable them to be more aware of their rights and duties, and a mother's educational level directly affected her child's welfare, by reducing malnutrition and mortality rates and promoting a rise in family income in the long term. In the field of health, HIV/AIDS and malaria remained rampant, and her delegation hoped that contributions from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria would enable strategies to be developed to combat those diseases efficiently.

43. Nothing could justify the exploitation of child labour, the sexual exploitation of children and their participation in armed conflict. To combat those scourges a culture of peace must be promoted, which would involve educating children to respect others, familiarizing them with human rights and enrolling them in school. At the national level, efficient mechanisms must be established to prohibit the recruitment of children into the armed forces. In that regard, the extraordinary work done by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict was welcome.

44. In January 2002 Andorra had submitted its initial report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. The Committee's observations and recommendations would enable her Government to better target the policies that was developing for children.

45. **Ms. Tang** (Singapore) said it was encouraging to note the many countries that had ratified or signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child and developed national plans of action to implement the goals endorsed by the World Summit for Children. Commitments had also been made at the regional level, particularly in the Declaration on the Commitments for Children in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

46. Significant strides had been made in improving the lives of children worldwide since the 1990 World Summit for Children. Indeed, millions of young lives had been saved, more children than ever were in school, and more children were actively involved in decisions concerning their lives.

47. Critical challenges remained, however. Many children continued to die from preventable diseases, lived in squalor, lacked access to education and suffered from exploitation and violence. The goal of a world fit for children was still a long way off.

48. The General Assembly special session on children had agreed to a 10-year time frame to achieve the 21 specific goals for child health, education and protection. It was incumbent on adults to make those goals a reality, especially by creating an environment conducive to peace, security, economic and social development and good governance.

49. Her delegation attached particular importance to the protection and promotion of the rights of children, which were based on four key pillars: good laws; a strong family network; a comprehensive health-care system; and a sound education system.

50. Her Government had submitted its initial report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. It had met the Summit goals in the areas of child health and development; a child born in Singapore today had an

average life expectancy of 78 years. In the field of education, which had been a top priority for her Government, a bill enacted in 2000 made primary education compulsory.

51. **Mr. Koren** (Israel) said that in 2001, 2.1 million children under the age of 18 had been living in Israel, comprising slightly more than one third of the population. His Government was committed to the protection and welfare of children and had already made significant progress towards achieving those objectives, particularly by increasing its focus on the rights of children, irrespective of their background, and raising public awareness. All branches of government had been working closely with non-governmental organizations and children themselves to implement the international instruments and agreements for the protection of children's rights, especially through the National Council for the Child, created in 1979.

52. Since becoming a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991, his Government had undertaken comprehensive reforms. The ratification of the Convention and the enactment of the 1992 basic law on human dignity and liberty had enshrined the rights of the child in the Constitution.

53. His Government had also acceded, in 1999, to the amendment to article 43, paragraph 2, of the Convention, which brought the number of experts members of the Committee on the Rights of the Child from 10 to 18, and it hoped that the amendment would swiftly enter into force.

54. The Israeli Government attached great importance to the outcome document of the General Assembly special session on children, "A world fit for children" (A/S-27/19/Rev.1), and to the Global Commitment reaffirmed at the Second World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, held in December 2001.

55. Over the past decade, Israel had passed more than 20 laws guaranteeing the right of children to health care and education. In 1997, the Ministry of Justice had appointed an intergovernmental committee of experts to re-examine the entire body of Israeli law in the light of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and had asked it to present recommendations for the codification and implementation of the Convention. Extensive campaigns had been undertaken to increase public awareness of the problems of child abuse and neglect, and special treatment programmes had been developed. The Golda Meir Mount Carmel International Training Center offered a number of programmes in early childhood education.

56. Expressing his condemnation of the immoral practices of which children were victims, he said that in November 2001 Israel had signed the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which would be ratified once national law had been adjusted in accordance with the commitments set out in those instruments.

57. Convinced that the use of children in armed conflicts was entirely contrary to basic international norms and the principles of humanity, Israel commended the Secretary-General's report on protection of children affected by armed conflicts (A/57/402). For the long-term protection of the rights of the child, it was critical to promote a culture of peace and tolerance and to ensure that peace was maintained not merely by treaties reached by Governments, but by respect between the peoples themselves.

58. Since education was a way to transform attitudes, efforts to bring Israeli and Palestinian children together, through various projects, were of prime importance. The Israeli Government urged UNICEF to intensify its efforts in that regard.

59. The death of any child, Palestinian or Israeli, was a tragedy, and it was regrettable that certain delegations cynically implied that there was no hope of improving the situation. Replying to the statement made by the Observer for Palestine, he again condemned the use of children in armed conflict. He said that, during the recent outbreaks of violence, Israel had repeatedly protested against the use by the Palestinian leadership of children under the age of 15, who were often placed in the front line of the hostilities against Israel. The Israeli Government was doing everything in its power to avoid injury to innocent civilians, in particular children, even while the Israeli civilian population was the target of a widespread wave of violence.

60. Convinced of the need for common action, Israel called on its neighbours to cooperate in the creation of a Middle East that was fit for children.

61. **Ms. Rajaonarivelo** (Madagascar) said that although the progress made was encouraging, the rights of children continued to be trampled in various ways,

in particular by sexual and commercial exploitation, armed conflict and HIV/AIDS.

62. The international community should take firmer and more effective measures to eliminate the major causes of those problems. In that regard, Madagascar welcomed the holding of the Second World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, the adoption of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its protocols, and the formation, on the initiative of the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Political Affairs, of a working group to integrate child protection into United Nations peacekeeping operations, which was carrying out important work.

63. The Government of Madagascar reiterated its determination to take medium and long-term measures to tackle the problems hindering the development of children, and wholeheartedly supported the provisions set out in the Plan of Action that had emerged from the General Assembly's special session on children, calling for the creation of partnerships with the various stakeholders within society and the international community.

64. Madagascar repeated its appeal for the mobilization of sufficient resources for the attainment of certain priority goals during the decade 2001-2010, especially with respect to curbing violence, preventing HIV/AIDS, enhancing nutrition and combating the traffic in children. The Government expected to ratify soon the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which it had signed in September 2000, and announced that it would soon submit its second periodic report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, in accordance with article 44 of that Convention.

65. On the national level, the Government was working fully to guarantee the rights of the girl child, especially in the areas of education and health. A law prohibiting paedophilia had been adopted; a bill concerning violence in the home and child rape had been submitted to the National Assembly; and new measures had been taken to strengthen the child adoption law.

66. **Mr. Murargy** (Mozambique) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Namibia on behalf of the Southern African Development Community.

67. The twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly and the adoption of the Plan of Action to create a "World Fit for Children" had bolstered the international community's determination to honour its commitments. The implementation of the Plan of Action remained the only option for realizing children's aspirations to live in a fair and safe world. His delegation called upon all Member States to demonstrate their commitment and strong political will and to make results-oriented international cooperation a priority.

68. Because the least developed countries lacked the resources to meet the social and economic development challenges involved in building a world fit for children, his delegation urged development partners to increase their financial support for those countries, particularly in areas related to children. It was also important to implement the outcomes of major United Nations conferences, since the eradication of poverty was critical to addressing the needs of children.

69. His Government attached great importance to the promotion and protection of the rights of the child and had ratified the relevant international and regional legal instruments, namely, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, many provisions of which were reflected in its domestic legislation. For instance, his Government was committed to full enforcement of the Military Service Act, which established 18 years as the minimum age for conscription into the national army.

70. The entry into force of the two Additional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child was a relevant step towards preventing the trafficking of children and their involvement in armed conflict. His Government believed that the incorporation of the major norms contained in those Protocols in its domestic legislation could strengthen the mechanisms aimed at preventing violations of the rights of the child.

71. His Government had adopted a people-centred national strategic plan for poverty reduction, which it was implementing in partnership with civil society and with the support of the international community. The strategy accorded the highest priority to children's needs and called for ensuring that by 2015 all children, boys and girls alike, would have access to full primary education and equal access to all levels of education. To do so, his Government was working towards

increasing the number of primary schools by more than 50 per cent and allotting an equal share of the vacant places for enrolment to boys and girls. Moreover, his Government was subsidizing school supplies to guarantee children from poor families access to basic education. Lastly, the Government was working to reverse the low enrolment rate for girls, which was due to gender stereotypes and the impact of HIV/AIDS. The latter was an additional challenge.

72. His Government believed that investing in children's health and education was the only way to ensure the sustainable development of Mozambique and a better future for its people; it was determined to succeed in that task.

73. **Ms. Al Haj Ali** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that her country, 40 per cent of whose population was under the age of 15, attached particular importance to children, as was shown by the establishment of a high-level committee for children, bringing together all governmental bodies and non-governmental organizations and responsible for all questions related to children and for the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Syria had ratified in 1993.

74. In cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund, her Government had established a national working group to prepare for the national conference on children to be held during the last quarter of 2002 and to draw up a national plan of action for children. At the international level, her Government had decided to sign the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

75. Her Government had done much to promote child health and development and sought to ensure that all children, including those in rural areas, benefited from primary health care. A pilot programme had also been launched, involving various international and non-governmental organizations, to promote child development, empower women and improve living conditions. In addition to the efforts made by the Ministry of Health, the fundamental values of Syrian society ensured that HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases and drugs did not pose a real problem in the country. In the education sector, education was compulsory and free, girls made up 48 per cent of students and the Ministry of Education had modified school curricula to introduce the concept of the rights of the child. Lastly, the minimum employment age had been increased to 15 years.

76. Turning to the report of the Secretary-General on the protection of children affected by armed conflict (A/57/402), her delegation hoped that the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict would be able to perform his duties with regard to Palestinian children, who were victims almost daily of the Israeli occupation. Israel's occupation of the Syrian Golan since 1967 was the main obstacle preventing thousands of Syrian children from exercising their rights, particularly their right to a normal life, education and freedom of movement.

77. Her delegation hoped that no double standards would be applied to questions relating to children. The well-being of children — the basis of society — must be an integral part of social development. Despite the progress made by her Government over the past 10 years in improving the lot of children, the efforts made should be continued and stepped up in order to improve their living conditions.

78. **Ms. Khalil** (Egypt) said she would have liked the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict to talk about the situation of children living under foreign occupation, particularly the Palestinian children of the occupied Arab territories, whose suffering was immeasurable. Those children were deprived not only of their most elementary rights, such as the right to live in peace in a family that was not constantly threatened with losing its home or means of subsistence, but also their only means of achieving a better future, namely, education, since the occupying authorities closed Palestinian schools.

79. Concerning the report submitted by Israel, the occupying Power, the Committee on the Rights of the Child had expressed profound concern at the absence of any information on the situation of children living in the occupied Palestinian territories and at the legal distinction made between an Israeli child, defined as any person under the age of 18, and a Palestinian child, defined by Israeli military order No. 132 as any person under the age of 16. The Committee had also expressed grave concern at complaints that Israeli police had tortured Palestinian children and at the serious deterioration in health care for children in the occupied Palestinian territories. To remedy that situation, the Committee had recommended that the Israeli

Government bring its legislation into line with the first two articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, investigate all cases of torture of children and bring the perpetrators to justice and provide health care to all Palestinian children. The suffering of those children was so great that there was little hope that their situation would improve in the near future. Her delegation called on all countries to come to the aid of Palestinian children in order to enable them to lead a decent life.

80. Her Government supported all national and international activities to protect children and promote their development. It had made children's issues a top priority and was sparing no effort to that end. Internationally, it had participated in the negotiations on the outcome document of the special session of the General Assembly on children and was committed to abiding by its content, had been one of the first countries to accede to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, had recently acceded to the two Optional Protocols to the Convention and was confident that it would sign all the international instruments aimed at strengthening children's rights. Nationally, her Government had published a document proclaiming the second decade for the protection of the Egyptian child (2000-2010) and with regard to the social, cultural and legislative aspects of child development, supported national children's rights organizations and assisted children that required special attention, such as disabled, sick or orphaned children.

81. **Ms. Erotokritou** (Cyprus) said that while her delegation had associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Denmark on behalf of the European Union, she wished to briefly outline her Government's policy on agenda item 105.

82. Cyprus was a small country with a child-centred society and a strong family tradition. Since 1960, the protection of children had been at the top of the agenda of her Government, which had developed a comprehensive legislative framework and invested heavily in social policies aimed at children's well-being.

83. If the international community wished to create a world fit for children, it could not confine itself to renewing commitments but must also take practical steps towards that objective. Her Government, which had participated actively in the special session on children, stood ready to do its part.

84. Cyprus had ratified without reservation all major international instruments for the protection of children. It had also signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography and was taking all necessary steps for its ratification.

85. Her Government was working to bring its national legislation into line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the *acquis communautaire* of the European Union. A central monitoring committee had been established, which, in cooperation with non-governmental organizations, raised public awareness of the rights of the child, monitored progress and identified areas where updating was needed.

86. Education and health were areas of the utmost importance to her Government. Education was compulsory until the age of 15 and children with special needs received particular care. Her Government worked in partnership with non-governmental organizations and local community councils and provided technical assistance and grants for the operation of social programmes and services.

87. Her Government's national plan of action for the period 2000-2004 was multi-dimensional and far-reaching and its overall objective was further to integrate the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in the entire educational system and enhance children's awareness of their rights. It also sought to improve children's health and well-being, encourage their participation in decision-making and disseminate information on issues related to children.

88. It was regrettable that the Turkish military occupation of a third of Cyprus prevented the Government from applying the provisions of the plan of action to children throughout its territory. She emphasized the plight of Greek Cypriot children living in the occupied area, whose only choice after elementary school if they wanted to remain with their family was to discontinue their education.

89. A world fit for children was possible only if there was peace and stability. Protecting children from the terror of war was not merely an obligation towards children themselves and their families but also towards all humanity.

90. **Mr. Baduri** (Eritrea), recalling the commitments to children that the international community had recently made, particularly to create a world fit for

them, briefly described the measures that his Government had taken to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

91. Many programmes and initiatives had been established to improve basic social services at the national, regional and local levels and thereby promote and protect the rights of children. Moreover, specific steps had been taken to reduce infant and maternal mortality rates by expanding vaccination programmes and reinforcing primary health services in rural and urban zones.

92. To date, more than 11 million African children had been orphaned as a result of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which was one of the major concerns of the region. His Government, joining the global efforts to combat that scourge, had launched a programme, known as the HAMSET programme, to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria, sexually transmitted diseases and tuberculosis.

93. As for education, net enrolment of children had increased, but ensuring universal and high-quality education, particularly for children living in remote areas, remained a challenge. The Government had nonetheless decided to revitalize the national educational system to meet that challenge.

94. Eritrea attached great importance to children who lived in difficult circumstances owing to disabilities, displacements, loss of parents and the danger of landmines.

95. His Government had developed a five-year plan of action to respond to the needs of all children, but financial and technical assistance from the international community would be required to implement the plan.

96. His delegation concluded by recalling the severe food shortages from which 1.4 million Eritreans suffered, and stressed the direct link between such shortages and the survival and development of children.

97. **Ms. Šimonović** (Croatia) noted that the outcome document of the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly (A/RES/S-27/2) contained the necessary tools to build a world fit for children and stressed, in particular, that the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its two Optional Protocols set the necessary international legal standards for their protection. Croatia had ratified the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and had prepared a binding declaration on the minimum age for voluntary military recruitment, which would enable the country to ratify the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

98. Every effort must be made to develop national plans of action to help implement the 10 objectives. In Croatia, the Council for Children was about to complete a revised national programme of action for children, and the Parliament had adopted a special national programme of action for young people between the ages of 15 and 29, to be implemented during the coming five years, which would increase youth participation in decision-making processes and in the further development of a democratic society.

99. The mandate of the Committee on the Rights of the Child was to ensure that countries effectively implemented the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Croatia had submitted its second report to the Committee to inform it of developments in national legislation. The Committee had recommended that Croatia should consider the possibility of establishing an independent body to monitor the rights of the child. The Croatian Parliament was currently reviewing a draft law on an independent and autonomous ombudsperson to protect and promote the rights and interests of children, provide public information, advise children and cooperate with them.

100. **Mr. Gospodinov** (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) said that the special session of the General Assembly on children had served to emphasize yet again the importance of attending to the needs of children and taking their views and concerns into account.

101. One of the important changes preceding the special session was the realization of the magnitude of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and its implications, particularly for children. The impact of HIV/AIDS was especially serious for the young, who, even if the disease did not affect them directly, were particularly vulnerable when they lost their parents or were victims of increasing discrimination.

102. To counter that situation, the International Federation was increasing its support to national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies to build their capacity for intervention, for example, through HIV/AIDS awareness-raising for the young or food distribution for those made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS.

103. The International Federation believed in action. More than ever before, the national societies were assisting victims of natural disasters and vulnerable people, many of whom were children. Greater account should be taken of the plight of children in humanitarian assistance and rehabilitation programmes for victims of disasters and conflicts.

104. During the special session, the General Assembly had emphasized the need to protect children from harm and exploitation, particularly any act of violence, abuse, exploitation and discrimination. He regretted, however, that segments of the international humanitarian community itself had stood accused of sexually exploiting aid beneficiaries, including children, in West Africa. The International Federation was particularly concerned over such instances, which it considered intolerable, and had taken steps to remedy the situation in collaboration with United Nations partners and other agencies.

105. Given those problems, it would be advisable to reaffirm the principle of accountability and to ensure that the Federation's actions were consistent with the needs and interests of vulnerable people, especially children. Children were not only the future of humanity, but also its present.

106. **Mrs. Jackdeen** (Nigeria) noted that her Government had signed and ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which had been simplified, translated into Nigeria's three main languages and distributed to the relevant governmental and non-governmental organizations, and signed the two Optional Protocols to it. Despite the efforts made, children remained increasingly vulnerable for diverse reasons. More than 70 per cent of the population, particularly women and children, lived below the poverty line. Consequently, Nigerian children lacked access to the same quality education enjoyed by children from developed countries.

107. Most Nigerian children also had insufficient access to good health care, nutrition, safe drinking water and sanitation, and the infant mortality rate continued to increase owing to such preventable diseases as malaria, respiratory infections, diarrhoea and tuberculosis. Some 10 per cent of infants in Nigeria died before the age of one, and another 6 per cent died before the age of five. HIV/AIDS was spreading fast and depleting the population of its youngest members, thus further compounding such problems in Nigeria and other developing countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, where harsh socio-economic realities adversely affected children.

108. Progress had nevertheless been made in many areas. In the field of education, the universal basic education programme, established in 1999, continued to provide excellent, compulsory and free primary education to all children from the age of five. With respect to health, her Government was mobilizing resources to achieve 100 per cent immunization coverage for all vaccine-preventable diseases and to eradicate polio by 2005. The President of Nigeria, who had engaged all branches of Government, opinion-makers and civil society to combat HIV/AIDS, was personally leading the national campaign against that scourge.

109. The rights and welfare of vulnerable and disadvantaged children were being safeguarded through cooperation with the donor community, United Nations agencies, the private sector and local non-governmental organizations.

110. Her delegation considered the use of children as soldiers and mercenaries in armed conflict to be a crime. Similarly, trafficking in children and their sexual exploitation constituted a new form of slavery and a crime against humanity. Her Government therefore urged the international community to cooperate and establish partnerships to develop a world fit for children, since the scarcity of resources, the debt burden and lack of technical capacity and professionalism were preventing Nigeria and most developing countries from resolving the problems that affected children on their own.

111. Her delegation noted that the national programme of action remained geared towards implementing the goals set at the World Summit on Children and the General Assembly special session on children.

112. A summit on children had also been held in Abuja, which had brought together hundreds of children from all parts of the country, and a multi-media programme for children had been established to transmit to them core values of Nigerian history and cultures, and broaden their understanding of government activities concerning their development.

113. Her Government, in collaboration with UNICEF, had conducted a situation assessment and analysis study of the rights of women and children, which had

provided the basis for developing a six-year country programme of cooperation with UNICEF and had enabled her Government to take better account of children's interests in its policies and programmes.

114. **Mr. Rastam** (Malaysia) said that the promotion and protection of children's rights should be priorities in national programmes of development. The record number of ratifications and accessions by States to the Convention on the Rights of the Child clearly showed the lack not of political will, but of resources. That problem must be addressed to further promote and protect children's rights.

115. His delegation noted in that regard that many children continued to work to feed their families, and that creating an enabling national and international environment to free them from their burdens rather than simply making child labour illegal would best resolve the problem.

116. His delegation noted with concern that children had been made into both targets of violence and, worse yet, perpetrators of violence in armed conflicts in recent years. Governments must protect the physical security of children in such circumstances, give them legal protections and grant no leniency for the crimes against innocent children. At the same time, the children who had been manipulated by adults to commit atrocities should be treated humanely.

117. His Government condemned in the strongest terms the use of rape as a weapon of war, and noted with satisfaction that the International Criminal Court considered rape and sexual slavery as war crimes and crimes against humanity. He hoped that the perpetrators of such crimes would be brought to justice.

118. His delegation noted with concern the failure to address the plight of children in the Middle East, particularly in the occupied Palestinian territories and the Syrian Golan. The General Assembly must make every effort to remedy that situation, given that neither the Palestinian Authority nor the Syrian Government was in a position to do so. His Government commended the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children in Armed Conflict, hoped that he would look into the plight of Arab children living under Israeli occupation and urged the occupying Power to fully cooperate with him.

119. His Government also noted with concern the plight of children suffering under sanctions, particularly in Iraq, where child and maternal mortality ranked among the highest in the world. His delegation called for the immediate review and lifting of sanctions, and urged that all future sanctions should be imposed only after an in-depth study of their potential impact on civilians, especially children.

120. **Mr. Faati** (Gambia) noted that his Government had signed the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and intended to ratify them soon. It had also ratified International Labour Organization Convention 182 concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour.

121. His Government had a deep commitment to protecting the best interests of the child. The Gambian Constitution included a section on children, a committee for children had been established at the National Assembly, and diverse initiatives had been launched concerning nutrition, health — particularly HIV/AIDS and disabilities — and education. The campaign against poverty and underdevelopment was critical to the success of such initiatives and, in that regard, his Government thanked donors and partners such as UNICEF, UNDP and UNESCO for their support.

122. His delegation placed special emphasis on the situation of the girl-child. The Gambian head of State had created a scholarship trust fund to ensure free education for every girl-child, and a sexual harassment policy was also being developed.

123. The situation of children in armed conflict had attracted his Government's attention, especially since the potential for creating another generation of children afflicted by conflict in the West African subregion was great. The international community must spare no effort to rebuild the lives of children emerging from conflict.

124. The children who had addressed the General Assembly during the special session on children had made their voices heard. It was no longer possible to ignore them.

125. **Mr. Cordeiro** (Angola), after associating himself with the statement made by Namibia on behalf of the Southern African Development Community, welcomed the results reached in the children's rights area in the

past year and the entry into force of the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

126. His Government was making efforts to reduce by 2015 the high levels of poverty, which was a leading threat to the rights of children. His delegation called on the international community to focus on children's access to food to help to balance the nutritional content of their diets.

127. The World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, in Yokohama, had produced excellent results, but the successful implementation of its resolutions required effective mechanisms to prevent the sale of children, child pornography and the sexual exploitation of minors.

128. An entire generation of Angolans had experienced war and lived under extremely difficult conditions. The effects of war on women and children and the need to enable them to recover both mentally and physically and take a new direction in their lives had been fully revealed only after the April 2002 ceasefire. His Government, aware of its responsibilities, had implemented a broad programme to facilitate access to basic services, but its complete implementation could only be achieved with the support of the international community. His delegation thus counted on its cooperation and solidarity.

Right of reply

129. **Ms. Rasheed** (Observer for Palestine) noted that only an end to the occupation of Palestinian territory, a source of rampant lethal violence, would enable Israeli and Palestinian children to live in peace and not be prey to constant fear. It was extremely regrettable to hear the representative of Israel say that Palestinian leaders were sending their children off to commit suicide. The only desire of Palestinians was to ensure their children's welfare and enable them to live in peace. They taught children neither violence nor hatred. Children were only responding to the daily brutality of the Israeli occupation. One third of the 1,877 Palestinians killed since 28 September 2000 were children who had been at home or school or playing in the street, but it should be stressed that those killed while throwing stones had had the right to resist occupation and oppression. No people in history had ever welcomed occupying forces with open arms.

130. As the representative of Israel had said, it was necessary to work together, but the occupation must cease for that to occur. Only thus could Palestinian and Israeli children live in better conditions.

131. **Mr. Tamir** (Israel) noted that some delegations endeavoured to focus the attention of the Committee on a single issue. With regard to the statement by the observer for Palestine and her right of reply, he stressed that the individuals in the cases mentioned had been killed during battle. While it was regrettable that Palestinian children had perished, Israel had been exercising its right to self-defence.

132. Almost 200 young Israelis had also been killed, albeit intentionally, on the sole grounds that they were Jewish or Israeli. Palestinians must put an end to such deadly activities, cease to encourage them and renew dialogue. Terror would not end the occupation. The establishment of peace would be the only way to improve the living conditions of Israeli and Palestinian youth.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.